

THE HAND OF THE UNKNOWN

By ROBERT RUSSELL

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Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

James Alton, a young man brought up in the lowest form of New York, but of education and fine instincts, leaves the city after an altercation with his brutal father. Before taking his train he finds a handbag which has been dropped by a young woman sitting near him. Mrs. Grace Gordon, at the moment a telegram was handed to her. Unable to return the bag, Alton boards his train, and during the night it is stolen from him, but subsequently recovered. Arrived at his destination, Chanton, a country town, Alton meets a person in love with Grace, who happens to live there, but in so doing encounters Frank Black, an important personage in love with Grace. Black accompanies Alton to his home where, to the amazement of all, the girl rubs her handbag and throws her arms about his neck, calling him "Jim."

It develops that Grace has been made insane by news contained in the telegram that her brother and baby have been burnt to death in the fire which nearly destroyed Chanton, and seeing Jim, the last person who had noticed her, her mind became deranged, she takes him for her brother, who she believes can restore her child. Old Dr. Jordan, to Alton and through her arms about his neck, calling him "Jim."

CHAPTER VI.
A DELICATE SITUATION.
THE old doctor's manner was so serious as he spoke the words which told Jim that some mysterious sacrifice was expected of him that he did not hesitate to let his longing to help speak silently from his eyes. And his eagerness, regarded as personal thought, was seen and understood by the old man, for he slowly nodded his head as he drew Alton to a far corner of the room.

"I want to ask you a few questions," he said, "not that the answers would make any difference, as we will have to rely on you in any event, but I will feel better in taking the steps I mean to take if you can answer them satisfactorily."

"Anything, sir," responded Jim. "And I will tell you the truth." Gazing away from Alton, through the window and out over the green hills, Dr. Jordan began.

"You live in New York?"
"I did, sir. But—but I don't want to any more."

"Trouble?"
"Yes."

"Ashamed of it?"
"No, no, sir," and the old man glanced quickly at the expressive face.

"Then—never mind what it was."

"But I'd rather tell you, sir, if you're going to trust me. It's my father—old man to go. He said—he said I couldn't reform him. Oh, he has never done anything bad, sir; but—well, I thought that I wasn't doing any good, and perhaps after a while, if I went back, he'd have found out that he misled me, and then perhaps I would be able to—be with him more—and he'd like it."

The tone was convincing enough, but the old man had seen much of the country world, into which there often strayed a clever impostor, and he eyed the young man suspiciously.

"Kind of a reformer, eh?" he said, a bit incredulously.

"Oh, no, no, sir; but he's my father, you see. And he'd enjoy his life so much more if—if he knew how much happiness came from—well, being straight and not—oh, I can't tell you, sir; I don't knite understand it myself; but I know how different things have been with me since I started in a few years ago to learn something, and to—make what I learned help me along."

"Then, you're not perfect?" from the doctor, with a little sigh of relief.

"Perfect?"
Jim's thoughts left the quiet room with its restful atmosphere of rich cleanliness, and penetrated deep into the dirty heart of a great city. There he saw the repulsive picture of humanity huddled together in common filth, from which the only escape was the comparatively spacious freedom of the back room of some saloon.

"Perfect?" he repeated. "Did you ever see New York's Bowery, sir, and know the life lived there? How the young boys are brought up to understand nothing but the gratification of the body? And the—oh, you can't know, but Dr. Jordan, only believe this, that since the time I happened to go where good men and women were trying to help us who lived down there—and I went because I thought there would be sport in making fun of the 'guys with kid gloves'—from that time I have begun to see that there was something else to life, and I've tried to find it out—but please, please never ask me again if I'm perfect."

Again the old man's hand rested on Alton's shoulder, and there was affection in his touch.

"I understand," he said. "But one question more—your mother?"
"I don't remember her, sir," came from Jim, but with the words there was an involuntary squaring of his shoulders and a lifting of his head. "But she must have been—well, when my father thinks or speaks of her, sir, he's a different man. It's only the best things he does then, and I like to believe that my dreams of her are true."

There was a distinct silence broken only by the sound of Dr. Jordan's step, muffled in the deep richness of the thick rug on the floor as he crossed to the couch where lay the sleeping girl.

For some moments he stood there looking down on her whom he had seen develop from a child into a gracious, sweet, old-fashioned woman. Then back to Alton he came and his manner the ragged youth was almost humbly deferential.

"I asked you those questions," he

said, "because I am going to trust you to an extent that many people would not understand. I liked you at once, boy, when I saw you, but your answers have made me feel that I am not making any mistake—and it's what you have not said as well as your words that convinces me."

There was no question of the respect of his voice, and Jim knew that to this man the honesty of his heart was plain. "It is probably the strangest situation of which you have ever heard," continued the doctor, "and I am glad that the sacrifice of what I called a man's proudest possession will, under the circumstances, not be as great as I at first supposed. I referred to your identity."

"To one person you must completely lose that. Grace Gordon is at this moment absolutely insane, with a phase of the disease which, if not guarded with the greatest tact, will eventually destroy her mind completely. Her aunt, Mrs. Graham, tells me that she is practically sane today in most matters, but she believes that her baby has been burnt to death—as we know he was—but has been taken away from her for some reason which she cannot understand. And now Mrs. Gordon has taken you for her brother, who looked in his life, not at all like you."

"Your influence over her, strengthened by her belief that you are her brother Jim, has already proven itself to be a wonderful one. With its aid we may hope to bring back her mind; without it there is little doubt that she will grow rapidly worse, and in the end—my boy, I cannot speak of it. There's just this hope."

"We will keep every one, even Frank Black, who is still waiting there outside, I suppose, in ignorance of her condition if possible, in order that she may experience none of the evil results coming from the customary idiotic treatment of insane persons by their acquaintances, but we will hammer her in her belief that her baby and brother are still alive. You, my boy, must be her brother."

Jim had no thought whether or not the treatment laid down by this man of learning was orthodox in his character, but he knew that he, Jim Alton, had the opportunity to help in saving the reason of the fairest girl his dreams had ever pictured or his eyes seen.

"I guess I needn't tell you, sir," he replied, slowly, "that there is no sacrifice, if I can help."

Dr. Jordan smiled a little wistfully. "You don't realize yet," he said, "what it means—how every moment of the day you will have to think—think how her irresponsible mind is working; what tact and gentleness it will take, and how often the same question about the baby will be asked. None of the pleasures to which you have been accustomed can you enjoy—there must be nothing in your life but the thought of Grace Gordon."

"But, my boy, and the old man's eyes again sought the green fields there beyond the trees. "I can see, if we succeed in restoring her reason, the greatest of suffering for you at the end; for it will all be different when she is herself, you know."

"I'd thought of that," murmured Jim. "But the days before—it was different—would always be mine."

"Yes."

"To—remember."

"Yes."

"And even that knowledge—that it would all end when her mind came back, I am glad of the chance, sir, and I will do my best."

"I'm sure of that, Jim. I will call you that now, and we will tell every one that you—that you are some relative. And, of course, you will live here. Your pride, and I know you have pride, must be forgotten."

"You must accept your living from us temporarily, and money enough to get new clothes and all that. I will come every day and will always be ready to talk to you about her, or any perplexing matter in which Mrs. Graham cannot help you. And now I will leave you, taking Black with me. When the waker, remember—be gentle—and bring to your heart all the wisdom that dear mother of yours gave you in birth. Good-by."

"Good-by, sir," came low, from Jim. "And thank you."

As Dr. Jordan crossed the room toward the door Mrs. Graham left her place by the window where she had remained while the men were talking, and accompanied him to the porch, and Jim, a moment later followed them; quickly.

"Just a moment, sir," he said to the old man, "I suppose there is a post-box near here? Will you wait a moment while I write a little note?"

"Certainly, Jim; but we don't have mail boxes here. I'll drop it in the postoffice."

Having ascertained from Mrs. Graham where he could find paper and ink, Jim left them standing on the veranda just as Black joined them.

"I'm pretty hungry, aren't you, doctor? Come and have lunch with me," and he certainly looked the part of one conscious that he had been forgotten.

"Surely," responded Dr. Jordan, as after a moment Jim returned and handed him a sealed envelope.

"It's just a line," said Alton, aside, "a letter to father telling him where I am so that in case he's sick or—or needs me, you know—"

"All right, Jim," replied the doctor. "I hope, though, that he won't come here."

"Oh, no, sir, he'll tear it up probably—but he's used to having—well, I will feel better to send it."

"Good-by for the present?" called Black as they turned to leave. And then again Dr. Jordan took Alton's hand in his own.

"Get some clothes," he said so that only Jim heard, and the ragged stranger felt the crispness of greenbacks in his fingers.

Down the broad pathway walked Black and the old man, the latter carrying Jim's letter, fearful lest his absent-mindedness would cause the miscarriage of the missive.

"Now, for heaven's sake, Doc, tell me who he is," said Black, in evident disgust. "Why all this mystery?"

"A distant relative—sort of prodigal son, I believe."

As the doctor raised his hand to adjust his glasses the tall man had an opportunity to glance at the letter, and this opportunity he seized. The address was plain enough, but only the last name written there could he read.

"—Alton, 208 Bowery, New York city," he repeated to himself over and over. "I may need that."

CHAPTER VII.
NEWS.

DR. JORDAN and Black lunched together at the American House, where the latter had boarded for many years, and afterward, deserted by the man of medicine, Frank was sitting on the comfortable porch smoking his prosperous looking cigar, when his friend the sheriff climbed the steps carrying a large suitcase.

"Taking a trip?" inquired Black.

"Got to go to New York," responded the officer of the law. "They want me to identify that fellow that got away from jail here last winter."

Black was thoughtful for a moment, while the faithful preserver of the peace waited for the remark which the other's attitude told him might be expected.

"Say, sheriff," he said finally, "I've done a few things for you, haven't I, that you wouldn't care to have talked about all over town?"

"Guess you have, Mr. Black."

"Well," continued the other, "this isn't anything very important—little matter of law business—but I don't want anything said about it just the same. You're in pretty well with the inspector down there, aren't you? Didn't he come from the place you did before you lived in Chanton?"

"Know him all his life," said the sheriff, proud of his acquaintance with such a well-known person.

"Say then, while you're in the city, just see if you can find any police record of a fellow named Alton—James Alton, of 208 Bowery. Of course, I don't know if he was ever arrested, but—well, just look him up, will you?"

"Surest thing, you know," from the sheriff, as he wrote the name and address on a slip of paper. "Glad to do it for you, Mr. Black."

"And," continued Frank, with a bit of a threat in his voice, "not a word, understand? Didn't I hear that Bancroft was going to fight against you for re-nomination?"

"Oh," said the man, comprehending fully Black's intimation, "I guess with you behind me he wouldn't have much of a show."

"I guess not, with me behind you. Goodby. And let me hear by wire if you learn anything, but don't write any names; I'll understand."

"All right, Mr. Black, good-by." Slowly in the direction of his office

Black walked, intent upon his thoughts. "I wonder if the chap's going to stay there at Grace's?" Quess I'm so suspicious, but there is something funny about the whole affair. Returned prodigal, indeed!"

These and like surmises occupied his attention, and even when he had reached his place of business and seated himself in a comfortable chair the thought of those within the great house far up the street kept recurring to him.

And his mind would have been far less tranquil had he possessed the power of second sight, for at the moment he was deep in such musings the first scene of the tragedy in which Alton was to be the predominating figure was being enacted.

He had not left the library until Mrs. Graham had finished her lunch, and even then his own meal had not been eaten in the most beautiful dining room he had ever seen, was a more matter of necessity, and was hurriedly taken that he might resume his position beside the girl. There he was now, as Grace opened her eyes, lay silent a moment, and then with evident relief turned toward him.

"I'm so glad you're here, Jim," she said. "When are we going to see my little one?"

Mrs. Graham listened anxiously, appalled at the thought of how much depended on the wisdom and tact of this stranger from the city, whence there was supposed to come nothing but evil.

"We're going just as soon as it's right. You know, Grace, you trust me, Jim, your brother."

A wondering look came from the girl, as, after a moment she stretched out her arms to him again.

"Of course I trust you, Jim. And you know, some way, I seem to trust you and love you more than ever today. It's the terrible dreams I have, perhaps, but you seem to be thinking about me so much."

Jim's hand sought the dark hair once more, and though conscious that his whole attitude was one of imposture, the great desire to make his constant thought of her accomplish physical good took away from him any sense of guilt. Mrs. Graham, not yet accustomed to seeing her niece dependent upon and soothed by Alton, now came to them.

"Don't you want to go to bed, dear?" she asked.

"No, aunt, I just want Jim to sit here by me and get me better so we can go to baby."

And so through the long afternoon and evening Alton remained by her side, taxing to the utmost his knowledge of every subject which he thought would interest her in his endeavor to draw her mind from the one topic which had been pronounced dangerous by Dr. Jordan. The girl seemed to forget as fast as information was given her, and by carefully suggesting one event after another he found that he could interest her by accounts of experiences in his own life, without creating any surprise in her mind that he, her brother, had undergone such strange trials and adventures, while she, his own sister, remained in ignorance of them.

Each suffering from diverse causes, and the night was well advanced before he could persuade Grace to retire, and it was Jim, of course, who at last accomplished this.

"You won't go away again, Jim, will you?" said the girl, appealingly.

"And if I have any of those bad dreams tonight you'll come?"

"He will be near you, Grace," interposed Mrs. Graham quickly, "and of course, I will sleep with you—but he'll come, dear."

"Good night, Jim." And again her

soft arms were about his neck.

"Good night, Grace," he said, and the kiss he pressed to her cheek brought much the feeling of a strong man caressing a child, fearful lest his mere touch might mar the smooth delicacy.

Long to the night he remained in the library, thinking how he could best fulfill the trust imposed upon him—the care of a wonderful woman's mind. And to his room, previously shown and made ready for him, he carried the thought. All through the night he dreamed pictures inspired by it.

While, some hours later, Grace, Mrs. Graham, and Jim were seated together in the library, Frank Black stood alone in his office reading a telegram from the sheriff, and in spite of himself, a satisfied smile possessed his countenance.

He was not a bad man, but the intrigues of politics in a country town had made him indelible mark upon his face, and where the results of a plan once formed proved its wisdom he was apt to lose sight of the means he had employed to bring about those results.

"Quick work, sheriff," he said to himself, "quick work. I don't wonder that Mr. James Alton, of No. 208 Bowery, decided to leave his home for parts unknown. And now," placing the telegram in his pocket, "what shall I do about it?"

The Continuation of This Story Will Be Found in Tomorrow's Edition of The Times.

Geological Survey Director
Smith Points Out Present
Structure's Defects.

"Merely another strong argument for a new building," is the view Director George W. Smith of the Geological Survey, takes of the fire in the building at 1330 F street early yesterday morning.

Director Smith declared that preventive measures would be considered, and that a conference would be held shortly for the purpose of again bringing the need of the Geological Survey to the attention of Congress.

It is thought that the removal of the chemicals into a separate building would eliminate one source of danger, and there is some possibility that this action may be taken.

"It is sheer absurdity," declared the chief clerk of the Survey this morning, "to have records valued at more than \$5,000,000 stored in a building that is far from fireproof, and more than that, with laboratories under the same roof."

NOT A TRAVELER.
POTTSTOWN, Pa., May 10.—Mrs. Leah Levegood, who in all her long life of eighty-three years had ridden only three miles in a railroad train, died at Pottstown Hill. She smoked pipe, lived outdoors a great deal, and was a remarkable woman in many respects.

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